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# Webster's fitness . . .

The House and Senate Judiciary committees are among the least pork-laden in Congress. Members of these committees pass out no patronage and distribute no largess; they focus more on civil rights and civil liberties. It is all the more impressive, therefore, that both committees have unanimously praised William H. Webster, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and President Reagan's choice to be director of central intelligence.

William Casey, the president's first choice to head the agency, was a veteran of the CIA's World War II predecessor, the Office of Strategic Services. In OSS days, standard equipment for an operative was a parachute, weaponry and hard currency to aid partisans or topple a government.

In today's world, the CIA's philosophy needs to be based on the rule of law. That philosophy seems to have animated Webster's life. A graduate of Amherst College and a veteran of World War II and Korea, he has been a US attorney and a federal district judge and was named to the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in 1973.

In 1978, President Carter appointed him director of the FBI, an agency undergoing the same loss of confidence as the CIA has had in the past few years. FBI agents were accused of disobeying the law in so-called "black bag" cases and of trying to escape congressional oversight.

"Congress is oversighting the hell out of us, and they should," he said in 1979. "We need to work on a charter. We need standards of acceptability." Webster restored the FBI's reputation in both instances. He de-Hooverized the FBI with congressional help, and with similar help may de-Caseyize the CIA soon.

"We'll miss you, Judge," Rep. Don Edwards (D-Calif.), told Webster at a hearing last week. That salute from a stalwart champion of the Constitution is heartening. If Webster's departure is a loss for the FBI, then in the alphabet soup of endangered liberties, it seems good news for the CIA and the USA.

# . . . and Gates' tinge

He had about him "the smell of Irangate," said President Reagan's old friend Paul Laxalt, explaining why the president withdrew his nomination of Robert Gates to become director of central intelligence. A less pungent phrasing of the same judgment came from the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, David Boren (D-Okla.), who said, "Mr. Gates was a victim of circumstances."

Republican and Democratic senators alike were reluctant to confirm Gates' nomination before they had complete answers to several grave questions about his role in the Reagan administration's covert conduct of foreign policy. It is too soon to judge whether Gates has been treated unfairly.

As Gates said in his letter to the president, however, "a prolonged period of uncertainty would be harmful" to the CIA. This inescapable period of uncertainty would also have been politically harmful to a president who is suddenly compelled to prove he is capable of governing.

Time and squads of investigators will likely reveal the truth about Gates: that he was a victim of guilt by association, or that he helped create those circumstances that made his confirmation impossible.

In a February 1986 speech at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, Gates, arguing that scholars ought to be employable by the CIA, said, "Our very existence depends on our reputation for integrity and for reliable and objective assessments." Today that declaration sounds like a clairvoyant summation of the Tower Commission's criticism of the CIA while Gates was the No. 2 man.

The commission's report found that the CIA failed to uphold the "integrity and objectivity of the intelligence process." The report criticized the CIA, explicitly and implicitly, for crossing "the line between intelligence and advocacy of a particular policy."

This is a profound criticism. It implies that foolish and possibly illegal actions were taken because intelligence analysts pandered to what Gates, at Harvard, called "rigid ideological conceptions."